



The Importance of Marking Historic Spots

An Address

By HENRY W. SHOEMAKER



At Dedication of Marker
Nittany Furnace, Near State College, Pa.
October 30, 1922

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DR. SPARKS, DEAN WATTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Probably the first attempts at marking historic spots in Pennsylvania were made by the Indians many centuries ago. We of today are merely followers in their footsteps. Two of the most conspicuous examples are the hieroglyphic rocks on the Allegheny River, near Franklin, formerly called "Venango", in Venango County, and the so-called Picture Rocks on Muncy Creek, in Lycoming County. Both were said to commemorate military victories, though the rocks on the Allegheny River were chiselled at a much earlier period than the mural paintings of Muncy Creek. The hieroglyphics are crude affairs, but the painting on the "Picture Rocks" were said to be of rare beauty and marvelous coloration. The rocks of the Allegheny River will defy time, but the rapacious lumbermen who insisted on running logs off the mountain top above the "Picture Rocks" at that particular spot destroyed forever this master-work of the redman's artistry. Unfortunately we do not know the particular events which these early memorials were supposed to commemorate. All is shrouded in mystery so that the mere event of erecting and dedicating a marker does not insure its legend being permanent. When the white men came on the scene the Indians renewed their earlier custom of carefully marking historic spots in several gruesome manners. After Major Grant's defeat in 1757 in Western Pennsylvania the victorious Indians (they were on that occasion worthy of the appellation of savages) took particular pleasure in beheading all dead Highlanders who had participated in that unpleasant engagement, and impaling their heads, draped with caps and kilts, on the stakes which marked their race ground, as they called the path where they made their enemies run the gauntlet, near the stockade of Fort Duquesne. This was their way of marking an historic spot, and it was also a war memorial to the Highlanders who they looked upon as their

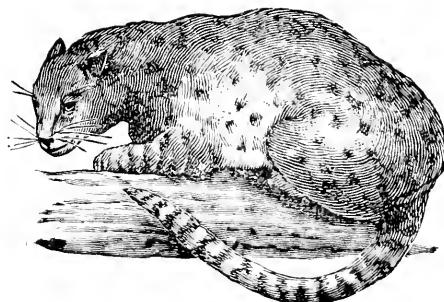
most dogged and unflinching foes. There was a kindly, almost fraternal feeling born of the hardships of forest life among Virginians, Royal Americans and Pennsylvania Riflemen recruited largely among the borderers and the redmen, but the Highlanders looked upon the Indians with an uncompromising hatred, and would give no quarter. When General Forbes' Scotch regiments approached the scene of this grisly memorial several months later they were shocked at the sight which met their eyes; there was too much realism displayed by the Indians in their choice of materials to mark that particular historic spot. It was the same as if the Allies had used German skulls instead of helmets to celebrate their victories! The Indians also had a habit of marking the spots near where they scalped white victims, their method being to sink a tomahawk into the branches or trunk of a large tree for every white man scalped. Peter Grove, the Ranger, tells of surprising an Indian scalping party asleep under a giant oak on the banks of Sinnemahoning Creek, in what is now Grove Township, Cameron County. On a branch which overhung the stream nine tomahawks were imbedded. Another method was to cut a nick or blaze in the tree, and the white men went them one better by "nicking" their rifles and pistols. The venerable W. H. Sanderson, who resides near Mill Hall, Clinton County, says that he recalls that the rifle belonging to his grandfather, the noted scout and scalp-hunter, Robert Couvenhoven, who died in 1846, had thirteen nicks on the stock. It is generally supposed that Couvenhoven slew at least twice that number of redskins, as the bounty on Indian scalps was around \$150 for an adult male and \$50 for females and children, but he may have changed rifles as time went on. As Indians became scarcer and bounty funds non-available, the early white hunters adopted some of their tactics by blazing trees where they had made a big general killing of game or else some particularly large elk or bear. They also nicked their rifles to mark the number of deer put to sleep. It was these sanguinary forms of human achievement which seemed alone worthy of commemoration in the bold life of the frontier. Little care was taken to distinguish the graves of the dead, at first a heap of stones to keep off wolves, later a stake, a shingle or a chunk of rough mountain stone seemed enough to mark the last resting places of the departed. In fact, there was an awful vacuum of nearly a century before marking historic spots came back into vogue in

Pennsylvania, when there were no battles or butcheries, or big game slaughters worthy of perpetuation. Even the Civil War did not kindle the spirit of statues, markers and monuments to Pennsylvanians at once, not until other States began erecting monuments at Gettysburg, and then Pennsylvania lagged lamentably. However, when at length the historic spirit was kindled the fervor of the people have exceeded all bounds. Pennsylvania is fast becoming the State of Memorials, and most of them are well worth while. Apart from the magnificent statues and other memorials at Gettysburg, Civil War heroes are remembered in all the cities of the State. Individual efforts, or local skirmishes are also fittingly commemorated like the "high water mark" of General Pickett's charge at Gettysburg, and the "Furthest East" memorial at Wrightsville, formerly Dagonoga, where the Pennsylvania Volunteers held back General Gordon's cavalry until the bridge across the Susquehanna was fired, and the valuable stores in Lancaster County saved from the Confederate hordes. Churches all over the State contain medallions, tablets and stained glass windows in memory of devoted pastors, church workers and churchly benefactors. Schools perpetuate the names of popular teachers, or great men, by their names, or by tablets placed in the halls or corridors. Hon. Gifford Pinchot wisely created the plan of naming groves of ancient trees after historic characters, like Alan Seeger Park, Joyce Kilmer Park and Dr. J. T. Rothrock Forest. But we are here today to speak of the most permanent form of all historical commemorating, the marking of historical spots. It is not battlefields alone that will tell the history of our people in the years to come, but the landmarks of domestic activity, commerce and manufactures. It is fitting that an important stage in the industrial development of Pennsylvania, like the charcoal iron furnaces should be marked. Every one of them, as far as known, should be as adequately commemorated as is this one here today. It is astonishing how little is known concerning the charcoal iron industry, which is only now going out of existence. Centre County had one or two of these old furnaces, notably the one at Curtin, in operation until very recently. No general comprehensive history of this industry has ever been published; it is kept alive by fragments of history, fugitive literary pieces, tradition, that is about all. Yet it was not only important commercially, but historically valuable and picturesque from a social and literary viewpoint. These feudal

lords, the Ironmasters, were the big men of their day, the Schwabs, Donners and Replogles of an earlier generation, yet how few of their names remain. It was timely to mark this old furnace, to save it from oblivion by reviewing its history and to inspire other communities to do likewise. Some are of unknown locations, and their names only remain on bits of old stove plates. There is a rich field of research for the antiquarian and writer, just to confine himself to the history of this charcoal iron industry.

Perhaps the great American novel, the great Pennsylvania novel at any rate, will be a story laid about one of the baronial estates of the old Ironmasters. Was ever a more delightful, or perennially interesting book written than Georges Ohnet's novel, "Le Maitre des Forges", translated into English as "The Ironmaster"? It was even more popular some years ago than today, for it was dramatized and played all over the United States, rivaling "The Lights o' London" as a melodramatic success, and was also the name of a noted race horse. Surely this great novel of Pennsylvania will take its plot from the lives of our early Ironmasters, or in some sketch of Indian forays along the Blue Mountains of Berks County during the French and Indian War. If marking these old furnaces begets the great novel, then those devoted souls concerned in marking this historic spot today have builded better than they knew. It will serve as a landmark to link the earlier days of this part of Centre County, with its busy, teeming present, the great intense life of State College, and the industry of the olden times. They have one point in common. Old Nittany Mountain looks down on both, impartial in shedding her glories of sunlight and shade. Nittany Mountain is feminine, for she is named not for an Indian chief, but for two beautiful Indian maidens named Nita-nee, one a great war queen of the very long ago, the other a humbler maiden who lived not far from Penn's Cave, and was loved and lost by Malachi Boyer, a Huguenot pioneer from Lancaster County. And in closing let us say we hear a lot about a so-called Nittany Lion. Do we not mean "Mountain Lion" or panther, for in the old days the panther, or Pennsylvania lion, was very much in evidence hereabouts, roaring terribly at night from the mountain tops, answering one another from Tussey Knob, the Bald Top and Mount Nittany. It is the noble supple animal, the Pennsylvania king of beasts, and not the shaggy African man-eater, that should be the patron

of the courage, force and persistence of our State College youth. If you are not sure of what it looked like, there is a finely mounted specimen in old "College Hall". Let us follow in history's paths, marking the worthy footsteps of our predecessors where they have builded wisely, and always conforming to local color, local traditions, local pride, so that we may in our turn re-enact the splendid chain of destiny from redmen to pioneers, from farms, furnaces and mills, down to the great day of this locality when State College shall have realized the ideal of her founders, as the foremost inland school of learning. And every step made in that direction should be marked, as her leading friends and sons have done with the scene of this old-time industrial plant and furnace. All these are mile-stones in the greatness of Centre County and Penn State, in the creation of a definite tradition and legend, which shall be her crown.



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